BALLET TODAY

VOL. I. No. 2 JULY, 1946

A MAGAZINE DEVOTED TO BALLET EVERYWHERE
SPECIAL ARTICLE ON AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

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BALLET TODAY

Vol. I. No. 2 July, 1946

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

AFTER long speculation as to which company from abroad would be the first to show us what Ballet outside England had been doing during our years of isolation, the distinction fell, almost unexpectedly, to the recently-formed Ballets des Champs Elysées. They more than deserved the honour, and their four weeks' season at the Adelphi Theatre was both stimulating and salutary for us all. Not everything they did was of equal merit—that could hardly be—and they appeared to have neither understanding of, nor interest in, classical ballet, but how one revelled in the invention and taste of their choreography and décor, their attack, joyous enthusiasm and infinite potentialities! If they can avoid the disintegration from within which seems to afflict all major ballet companies outside this country and Russia, it is fairly certain that Roland Petit will develop into a choreographer-dancer of the calibre of Massine. Already Jean Babilée has established himself in that tiny class of great male classical dancers that, until his blazing appearance, had contained during the last decade only Yousskewitch and Eglevsky (and these only if they prove to live up to the reputations they have made for themselves in America). Caryl Brahms has written about them, and Edward Mandinian has photographed them especially for *Ballet Today*.

This company were followed hard upon by the New Monte Carlo Ballet, which started a six weeks' season at the Cambridge Theatre on June 17th, giving evening performances on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and matinées on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Their programme for the first week did not by any means create so favourable an impression of the company as did that of their French rivals, but they have time to retrieve their reputation. Lifar's own ballets seem strangely out-of-date and uninspired. Considering his oft-expressed views on music in connection with ballet, his choice of so over-worked a concert war-horse as Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* strikes one as an almost contemptuous and quite unnecessary playing down to public opinion, while at times his choreography fails to avoid the ludicrous. It was a mistake, too, to have the curtain rise on *Salome* as the opening ballet for it is virtually nothing more than one long acrobatic solo. He makes amends, however, with his *Dramma per Musica* to music by Bach, and with an impressive décor by A. M. Casandrá. It is far too long, and the story is quite unintelligible, but it provides a magnificent opportunity to show Yvette Chauviré as a ballerina with the style, strength and poise of a young Nemtchinova. The "Choreography after Fokine" for the *Dances from "Prince Igor"* is so far after the master as to leave him out of sight.

All through the war years, we in England were constantly tantalised by the ballet news from America, and particularly with regard to the two major companies which emerged from what at times seemed chaos. Now one of these companies, the American Ballet Theatre, has arrived at Covent Garden for a season, commencing July 4th, and in this issue Mr. Jossleyn Hennessy, who saw some hundreds of performances by this company in the United States, writes of their repertoire, most of which is new to us, and of the dancers. There is a special interest for us in the works created by our own Antony Tudor, and, as the Ballet Rambert is concurrently celebrating its twentieth anniversary with a season at Sadler's Wells Theatre, we have a unique opportunity of studying them in conjunction with his earlier ballets, nearly all of which were created for the Ballet Rambert.

No less than four productions of *Giselle* will have been seen in London during a period of just over one month. First came the re-designed production by the Sadler's Wells Ballet at Covent Garden on June 12th, followed on July 11th by the Ballet Rambert at Sadler's Wells, and on July 15th by the New Monte Carlo Ballet. The American Ballet Theatre also have it in their repertoire for Alicia Alonso and André Eglevsky, but at the time of writing its première has not been announced. This must constitute some kind of a ballet record.

And, as we are talking of records, the season at Covent Garden by the Sadler's Wells Ballet, which finally came to an end on June 29th, after eighteen and a half weeks, broke the record for ballet there by four and a half weeks, and during the whole of this remarkable run there has hardly been an empty seat. The Company are now on a month's holiday, have a week's rehearsals in London from July 29th and then begin a five-week tour as follows:—Weeks commencing August 5th and August 12th, Theatre Royal, Newcastle-upon-Tyne; week commencing August 19th, His Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen; week commencing August 26th, Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh; and week commencing September 2nd, Theatre Royal, Glasgow. Arrangements have now been completed for them to appear in Vienna for ten days from October 5th to the 14th. They will have an autumn season at Covent Garden although the opening date has not yet been fixed.

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BALLET AT COVENT GARDEN

DURING their lengthy Covent Garden season the Sadler's Wells Ballet returned to something like the pre-war rate of new production by presenting two new ballets in addition to their revivals of *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Giselle*.

Frederick Ashton's *Symphonic Variations*, to the music of César Franck and with décor and costumes by Sophie Fedorovitch, was, by an unavoidable stroke of ill luck, robbed of its rightful reward of being the first English ballet to be created for the Covent Garden stage—a distinction which Ashton more than deserved—but coming as it did on April 24th, after the gloom and heaviness of Helpmann's *Adam Zero*, it had the advantage of contrast and was indeed like a shaft of sunshine, illumining the whole repertoire.

Symphonic Variations is the most sheerly beautiful ballet the Wells have ever done—but it is also the most masterly. Ashton has undertaken the hardest of all choreographic approaches, that of creating pure dancing which shall seem to grow out of the music without slavishly echoing it and achieve its own integrity without extraneous aids of story or symbolism. That the ballet is so utterly successful is as much due to Ashton's unfaltering musical response as to his choreographic mastery. The composition is for just six dancers and is conceived as a complete whole (not connected variations) thus following the real form of the music. The dancers never leave the stage and if one or two are not dancing they simply stand still—yet remain in their immobility an essential part of the choreographic pattern. There is nothing in the least virtuoso about the dancing ; it is unceasingly inventive but never "clever" or showy and creates an impression of effortless lyricism and almost godlike serenity which at moments quickens with an inner flame to blaze gloriously "like splendour out of heaven".

Sophie Fedorovitch's clear green and black décor and perfectly designed (and executed) white costumes are integral to the ballet and as great an inspiration as Ashton's own. *Symphonic Variations*, in fact, is not only the culmination of Ashton's past findings and achievements in the creation of lyrical balletic movement but also of the Ashton-Fedorovitch partnership which produced *Les Masques*, *Horoscope* and *Dante Sonata*.

The six dancers, Margot Fonteyn, Pamela May, Moira Shearer, Michael Somes, Henry Danton and Brian Shaw—selected for their musical sensitiveness as much as their pure dance ability—are magnificently loyal to the choreographer's intention; all give of their best yet none attempts to outshine the others. The ballet tries their endurance to the utmost, allowing no absence from the stage, permitting no suspicion of strain, and coming towards the end of a season that has been (particularly for the three Auroras) singularly exhausting. But they have all responded so nobly that it is now impossible to imagine the ballet without a single one of them.

Nothing could be more different from the simplicity of Ashton's ballet than Michael Benthall's mammoth *Adam Zero*, which was first presented at Covent Garden on April 10th with choreography by Robert Helpmann, music by Arthur Bliss and scenery and costumes by Roger Furse.

This allegory of the Life and Death of Man, conveyed "in terms of a company creating a new ballet", failed to unfold any very credible philosophy partly through over-complication and partly through confusion of purpose. The ballet-within-a-ballet meant that everyone on the stage represented at least two people while June Brae was, in the course of the evening, required to impersonate at least half a dozen. Symbolism was carried to the point of obscurantism on one hand and ridicule on the other, so that, after a first valiant but fruitless attempt to follow the multitude of hares the librettist had started, one tended to sit back and reflect on the audience's bemused attention in the light of Mr. Logan Pearsall Smith's remark that it is possible for boredom to be carried to such lengths that it becomes, in itself, a mystical experience.

In attempting to translate the unpromising scenario into terms of ballet, Robert Helpmann relied rather too heavily on his knowledge of the theatre, rather too little on his knowledge of ballet. *Adam Zero* is a display of stagecraft rather than choreography, follows no accepted method of ballet creation and, what is worse, fails to substitute any new method of its own.

It tells no straightforward story in terms of dancing; it creates no mood; it does not interpret the music; it does not even create dancing which is beautiful and varied enough in itself to allow the spectator to dismiss the impedimenta of "meanings". It does in fact create very little dancing—mass movement and meaningful gestures are not in themselves dancing unless they can be said to stem from musical reaction, and in *Adam Zero* the music may colour the picture, may sometimes explain the action or underline the dramatic tension but is always parallel to the choreography and never fuses with it into an inseparable whole. In short, Helpmann has produced something that may be very dramatic indeed, but fails to be in the least balletic.

(Even the "dramatic" effectiveness is lessened by the fact that—as Herbert Farjeon remarked of *Miracle*

SYMPHONIC VARIATIONS

Action photographs by Peggy Delius

Photograph by Edward Mandinian

ADAM ZERO (Central figures—Robert Helpmann, Leslie Edwards, June Brae. Right—David Paltenghi).

in the Gorbals—we seem to have seen so much of it all before; the "birth" scene might have created something of a furore if Antony Tudor had not used the same method of creating his hero in *Undertow* last year in New York; the *pas de deux* at the climax of Adam Zero's career is poor stuff after Ashton's Petipa parody in *A Wedding Bouquet*; and we would have admired the degrading exit of the Beast of Belsen the more if Falstaff had not so recently despatched Hotspur in the same manner.)

Among the interpreters of *Adam Zero*, June Brae gave a magnificent performance and David Paltenghi an excellently balanced one. The rest of the company worked exceedingly hard and rather thanklessly, while Roger Furse and Mr. Henry Robinson, the stage manager, had no end of a time displaying the Covent Garden stage equipment.

MARY CLARKE.

The Peggy Delius action photograph on the cover is of the six dancers in Frederick Ashton's "Symphonic Variations".

(*Continued from page* 3)

The publishers of *Ballet Today* and myself would like to thank all those hundreds of kind people who wrote to say how much they had enjoyed the first issue. It is with very great regret that we have had to disappoint them and all our other readers by an enforced cut in the number of pages, both of this issue and of No. 3, which will be coming out at the beginning of November, but paper restrictions have made this inevitable. We have overcome the difficulty as far as possible by using a smaller type so that the reading matter is not greatly reduced, and by using a thinner paper so that we could print the same quantity as before, which we felt was essential as we know that, even so, there were many who were unable to obtain copies. We hope that the reduction in price to 1s. 6d. will do something towards compensating you for the loss in size and, to some extent, in appearance. P.W.M.

INTERNATIONAL BALLET

For the first week in July the International Ballet is at the Theatre Royal, Glasgow. They then go to the Opera House, Manchester, for two weeks, and to the Royal Court Theatre, Liverpool, for the week commencing July 22nd. If a suitable theatre is available they are then hoping to give a London season.

BALLET THEATRE AT COVENT GARDEN
A PREVIEW

By JOSSLEYN HENNESSY

DIFFERING ballet conditions in Britain and America have produced some strikingly different results on the stage.

British conditions have led to the emergence in Sadler's Wells of a repertory company whose direction has not changed since its inception and whose choreographers and dancers remain more or less constant from year to year. The result has been to build up a finely disciplined, integrated company. The British public may not be consciously aware of it, but in 1946 they take for granted that they are going to see a well-trained corps de ballet, a group of experienced soloists with confidence in each other, and carefully produced, rehearsed and painstakingly lit ballets. As to the dancers, Margot Fonteyn is still in a class by herself, but Pamela May, Beryl Grey and Moira Shearer, to name but three, are in their different ways fine artists; broadly speaking, and possibly at the risk of some individual injustices, it is true to say of the rest that their strength lies in their team rather than in their solo work. The total effect of *The Sleeping Beauty* is superb; if, however, the solos were removed from their context and given as *divertissements*, some of the individual performances would seem merely adequate to the friendly and somewhat dim to the hostile critic.

It is the artist's job to exploit his strength and to capitalise his weaknesses if he can: Sadler's Wells aim at and achieve striking total effects.

In America ballet has no permanent headquarters; directions change kaleidoscopically; London in 1946 will have seen Covent Garden packed for eleven out of the twelve months; New York in the same period will have been able to stand some four or five months of ballet; the colossal expenses of maintaining a ballet company can only be met over there by whirlwind tours in which in 150 days, some 130 performances are given in 75 cities with immense distances between them. The physical strain on the artists is great. Under such conditions adequate rehearsal and attention to details is difficult. The leading soloists at least obtain some individual satisfaction but the lesser soloists and the corps de ballet merely have the exhaustion, so that every year most of the corps de ballet and one or two soloists usually resign. This means that in the month available for rehearsal for a new season, not only the new ballets but the entire repertory has to be gone through, which imposes a great strain on the artists. America has no solidly established companies like Sadler's Wells.

But America has a galaxy of talent.

Broadly speaking then, the American companies must rely on the brilliance of their individual artists rather than on their ensemble. Inevitably this places emphasis on the showmanship of the dancer and this is a noticeable difference between British and American ballet that you must allow for when you see Ballet Theatre.

British audiences, used to the self-effacement of a Pamela May, merging her performance into that of the ballet as a whole, may be disturbed at what may seem the circus ring "Hoop-la" tendencies of Ballet Theatre. They will be inclined to notice poor lighting or ragged ensembles. But before complacently observing that our methods are better than those of Ballet Theatre, it is relevant to note that an American audience might criticise the whole of Sadler's Wells as "tame", "dim" or "lacking in brilliance". It has taken me some months of ballet-going in London to accustom myself to what, as a Sadler's Wells admirer,

NORA KAYE AND HUGH LAING IN "PILLAR OF FIRE"

I call their serenity and their ensemble but what someone else might call their staidness or lack of vitality.

If you set out to enjoy some first class solo dancing and some vivid personalities, you'll enjoy Ballet Theatre vastly.

Heading the company are three superb dancers: Nora Kaye, Alicia Alonso and André Eglevsky.

Nore Kaye is a strong ballerina. Technically brilliant, she is a fine dramatic artist. I must have seen her nearer fifty than forty times in Antony Tudor's exacting *Pillar of Fire*, yet she has never ceased to move me profoundly by the grace of her movements and the intensity of her characterisation. Watch for her, too, as the Queen of the Wilis in *Giselle* and in Balanchine's *Apollo*. Her art has an intellectual quality that is most satisfying to those who have it in them to respond to it.

Alicia Alonso has a softer, more lyrical quality. She does a beautiful Giselle, is serenely ethereal in *Les Sylphides*, charming in *Bluebeard*, superb in her classic simplicity in *Apollo*. I am sure that London will love her.

André Eglevsky is, outside Russia whose dancers I have not seen, among the two or three greatest living male dancers. Unfortunately the Bluebird *pas de deux* is not included in Ballet Theatre's current repertory; no Bluebird that I have yet seen anywhere approaches his for brilliance, ease, precision and grace (although I am bound to say that I have never seen Yousskevitch in this role). Eglevsky is down for the Nutcracker *pas de deux*; do not miss this; note his *grands jetés en tournant*. In the last eighteen months his acting ability has developed and his Albrecht in *Giselle*, always superbly danced, now has gained in characterisation.

Janet Reed is technically not in the same class as Kaye and Alonso but she is a delightful artist with an entrancing personality and sense of humour. She dances with vivacity and wit in *Fancy Free* and with an ingenuous charm in Dolin's *Pas de Quatre*. She has a personality which she knows how to project across the footlights in a manner which may disturb some of Sadler's Wells more austere admirers but to which I for one am most ready to surrender myself.

Upon John Kriza, a capable dancer of great promise, has fallen the mantle of a number of male soloists who have left the company. He is a good classical dancer and has plenty to say for himself in character. You'll enjoy him in *Bluebeard* (classical) and he'll bring you out of your seat to cheer in the modern *Fancy Free*.

Jerome Robbins, an exceptionally good character dancer, would, I fear, with Fernando Alonso and Herbertt, make the Sadler's Wells three Ivans seem tame if that item were in Ballet Theatre's current repertory. He is the life of the party in *Helen of Troy* and without peer in his own *Fancy Free*.

Space lacks to write of the others in detail but I ask you to watch especially Lucia Chase (fine character work—particularly good in *Bluebeard* as the queen, a

JANET REED AND MICHAEL KIDD IN "ON STAGE"

JANET REED AND JOHN KRIZA IN "FANCY FREE"

part that she created), Muriel Bentley, Barbara Fallis (formerly of Sadler's Wells), Diana Adams, Dmitri Romanoff and Fernando Alonso.

Now for a rapid glance through the repertory.

Fokine's *Bluebeard* is one of the most delightful ballets ever created and characteristic of all that is best in the master's lighter vein. Offenbach's gay music might have been commissioned for this ballet so perfectly has Fokine utilised it. The choreography is full of subtle touches and will bear seeing time and time again. Bluebeard's role was originally danced by Dolin and has great possibilities for anyone who knows how to make use of them.

Pillar of Fire is a great dramatic ballet and is easily the best of the four Tudor ballets not yet seen in England. Tudor's *Romeo and Juliet* is a gorgeous spectacle, moving, satisfying. Your enjoyment of it will be enhanced if you re-read Shakespeare's play before seeing it; you will then appreciate how extraordinarily Tudor has managed to convey in movement many of Shakespeare's ideas; read especially, if you have time for nothing else, Mercutio's speech to Queen Mab and then see what Tudor has made of this in movement. The critics may say that it is artistically wrong to translate a masterpiece from one medium into another; I can only say that in this case I think Tudor is justified because he has succeeded. I have seen his *Undertow* only some half-dozen times, and, with the exception of the climax, which is tremendous dance drama with movement and music perfectly married, I find much of this incomprehensible and the choreography is not, to my taste, interesting enough to let the meaning take care of itself as, for example, with parts of Helpmann's *Adam Zero*.

Lichine's *Helen of Troy* when compared (as it inevitably must be) with Fokine's *Bluebeard* is a piece of insignificant musical comedy; but criticism is stayed by Lichine's immense vitality and Ballet Theatre make a most pleasing Saturday night's romp out of it; it is obviously great fun to do and you cannot help sharing the dancers' enjoyment. After a good dinner and a cigar this is exactly what is wanted. It makes no demand on the critical faculties, displays some lighthearted choreography by a man who knows his business, with lots of pretty girls and many laughs. Watch Robbins produce a police whistle and endeavour to direct the traffic as the whole corps de ballet wind themselves in mazes; watch him ostentatiously concentrate on his knitting when called upon to act as chaperone to Helen and Paris and surrender yourself to some good fun.

Ballet Theatre's *Les Sylphides* is interesting choreo-

MICHAEL KIDD AND MARJORIE TALLCHIEF IN "UNDERTOW"

ALICIA ALONSO AND ANDRÉ EGLEVSKY

NORA KAYE

graphically because it was revived for them by Fokine himself and the company have stuck religiously to his movements which differ in many details from those of Sadler's Wells.

Three Virgins and the Devil by Agnes de Mille is an amusing trifle which gives Robbins as the devil, Lucia Chase as the greedy virgin and Janet Reed as the libidinous one, scope for their outstanding comic talents.

Robbins' *Interplay*, a plotless ballet of movement for eight dancers is interesting as showing a possible trend of American ballet development in the marriage of neo-classical steps to modern music. His *Fancy Free* is a masterpiece of its kind—a superb piece of Americana, closely observed, choreographically exciting and perfectly set. It "wowed" America.

The opportunity to see *Petrouchka*, revived for Ballet Theatre by Fokine, should not be missed. After seeing *Miracle in the Gorbals* or *Adam Zero*, the crowd scenes in *Petrouchka* may strike some as the sort of foolery that one sees in such opera crowd scenes as Wagner's *Mastersingers*. It will be for old hands like Arnold Haskell to decide whether *Petrouchka* has in this respect become a period piece or whether, since ensemble is not one of Ballet Theatre's strong points, it is beyond the company's capacity. Robbins' *Petrouchka* is musically excellent, dramatically pathetic.

Tally Ho by Agnes de Mille has excellent moments, particularly for Lucia Chase and Janet Reed. Well worth seeing despite the fact that de Mille had not made up her mind whether she was producing a farce or a drama; the pathetic heroine moves in a different plane from the courtiers who are intentionally and agreeably farcical.

Giselle you know; on no account miss Alonso, Kaye and Eglevsky in this.

Balanchine's *Apollo* is wonderful choreography, usually brilliantly danced by Eglevsky, Kaye, Alonso and Barbara Fallis.

Billy the Kid is as much authentic Americana as *Rake's Progress* is British. I've seen it many times with great enjoyment. Costumes and scenery attractive; choreography original.

Graziana (classical and plotless) by John Taras to music of Mozart is promising rather than exciting. It is good to see that at least one young American choreographer is interested in classical movement.

On Stage by Michael Kidd is the story of a Chaplinesque stage hand, lonely and pathetic, who solves other people's problems and is himself ignored. The choreography strikes me as commonplace but the setting and the idea may make this as popular with the sentimental in England as it was in America. Reed lets off some nice fireworks in this.

If Ballet Theatre could learn much from Sadler's Wells, I think that Sadler's Wells could learn much from Ballet Theatre; certainly no one who enjoys ballet can afford to miss what should be a great treat for Britain—a complete change of repertory and personnel, fine artists and a different approach. Go and enjoy yourselves. I promise you many lovely nights and some great moments.

STOP PRESS.—I hear that Tudor and Laing are now coming with the Company: this is great news, and will enable London to see the Tudor ballets under the best possible auspices. "Billy the Kid" is not, after all, included in the repertoire.

(*Continued from page* 11)

of the working out of this theme often bears a strong resemblance to Kurt Jooss' *Green Table*. It is handicapped by employing several white members who cannot dance, and it is at times extraordinarily embarrassing. The roles of the soldier, nurse and business man were naïve and poorly executed characterisations.

Market Day was a disappointment. At times one felt that the real feeling of a West Indian market place would break through, but the ballet just muddled on to a dull ending.

Two points must be mentioned which compensated for much of the dullness. First the insidious appeal of the orchestra—tom-toms, maracas, electric guitar and piano—and second the natural charm and simple dignity of Marjorie Blackman, who played the Priestess in *De Prophet* and one of the vendors in *Market Day*.

ERNEST FRASER.

BALLET RAMBERT AT SADLER'S WELLS

JUNE 15th this year marked the twentieth anniversary of the Ballet Rambert, which made its first small start with a ballet incorporated into the A. P. Herbert-Nigel Playfair revue *Riverside Nights* in 1926. This was Frederick Ashton's first essay as a choreographer and Sophie Fedorovitch's first work as a designer for ballet. From that time Madame Rambert continued to give occasional performances with her pupils until in February, 1930, she presented the first programme of English Ballet at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. From these beginnings has grown the company we know today with its repertoire of ballets by Frederick Ashton, Antony Tudor, Andrée Howard, Walter Gore and Frank Staff, and with its décors by such artists as Sophie Fedorovitch, Nadia Benois, Hugh Stevenson, Guy Sheppard, amongst others.

They are marking their twentieth birthday with a five-week season which commenced at Sadler's Wells Theatre on the 1st July. The first night programme consisted of two Tudor ballets, the charming suite of dances, *Soirée Musicale* and the gay and witty *Gala Performance* with Sonia Arova seen for the first time as the temperamental Ballerina from Moscow; Andrée Howard's powerful *Lady into Fox*, and the first performance of Walter Gore's *Mr. Punch* which may well earn for itself lasting renown for being as typically English in mood as *Petrouchka* is Russian. This ballet has a pungent score by Arthur Oldham, one of our most promising young composers, and a décor by Ronald Wilson, both music and décor matching Gore's choreography with extraordinary felicity.

On July 15th Madame Rambert is presenting her full-length version of *Giselle* designed by Hugh Stevenson, with Sally Gilmour in the title role, Walter Gore as Albrecht and Joyce Graeme as Queen of the Wilis. The first act *pas de deux* which is often omitted nowadays is to be danced by Madame Rambert's youthful discoveries, Annette Chappell and John Gilpin.

Celia Franca is appearing as a guest artist.

On the following page we show ballerina Sally Gilmour in three of the ballets in which she is appearing during this season.

LES BALLETS NÈGRES AT THE TWENTIETH CENTURY THEATRE

AS the programme notes point out, it is impossible to judge the *Ballets Nègres* by Western European choreographic standards. The dance forms on which these are based are far removed from the ballet which is seen in Europe today. On the other hand, the mere fact that the ballets are presented on a European stage and within certain European conventions means that the choreographer has made an adaptation and not a translation of African techniques. If he had chosen to reproduce native African dances they would have possessed anthropological interest; but he has tried to do more than this by choosing, especially in *They Came*, European themes. His success must therefore be judged on the extent to which he has adapted these African movements and made them emotionally satisfying to European audiences.

Pasuka has failed in two ways. First, he does not use one hundredth of the richness of African native dancing; and second, what he does use is not properly adapted to the presentation of a theme in the European idiom.

In Geoffrey Gorer's excellent book *Africa Dances*, he points out that the standard of dancing of native tribes is very high, many tribes employing professional dancers: the Africans are not merely rhythm dancers, their dancing takes many forms according to their fetishes. Some of these dances require great skill, using pirouettes, leaps and acrobatic feats that would astonish a European audience. Pasuka has employed no movements of skill, but has rested the whole of his choreography on the simplest basic rhythm steps, the majority of these being even less developed than the dancing of the Aborigines.

The most successful of his ballets is *De Prophet*, where the colourful figure groupings, together with the insistent tom-tom beating (and a pleasant piano arrangement of *Joshua fit De Battle ob Jericho*) often combine to produce a sincere emotional effect. But *De Prophet* lacks any dramatic form and would have had a more valid ending after the fourth scene. The real weakness of Pasuka's work is shown up in *They Came* which has as a theme "the racial clash between Christianity and Primitive Religion, and between modern science and the witch doctors when the first white men came to Africa. When the European soldier introduces modern warfare, both black and white races suffer the same fate, and seek common shelter". In fact much

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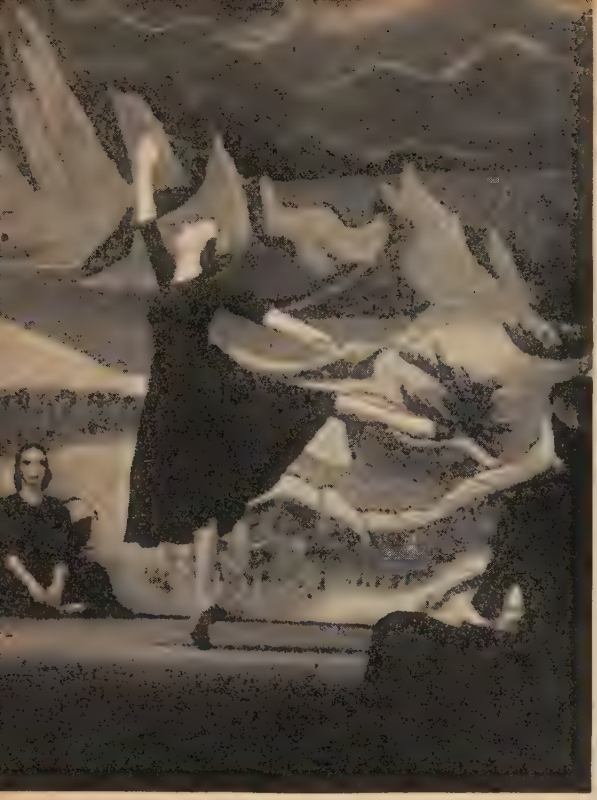


SALLY GILMOUR IN "DARK ELEGIES"
Action photograph by Peggy Delius

WITH WALTER GORE IN "LADY INTO FOX"
Action photograph by Heidersberger

SALLY GILMOUR AS THE DUCK WITH LULU DUKES AS PETER IN "PETER AND THE WOLF" *Action photograph by Peggy Delius*

SHEER TIGHTS AND DIAMANTÉ

By CARYL BRAHMS

THE *Ballets des Champs Elysées* has forsaken the Strand to gambol in the Home Pastures. I have seen dancers with a surer purchase on this earth; soloists of greater technical achievement; a more conscientious corps de ballet. But no company, not even the one with that fascinating Backer who contrived to seep on to the stage and take his curtains among the bouquets and the ballerinas, had quite so much charm. Even its shortcomings were endearing.

The company is new, young, and smallish, about the size of our Ballet Rambert, and, like this veteran body, it is a group of soloists dancing in a number of ballets rather than a company with stars and ensemble dancers —but what superbly presented ballets, and what engaging soloists! The dancers have been selected for their personality and promise rather than for their technical achievement (save for their newest recruit, Gordon Hamilton, from Sadler's Wells) and it is for this reason that the ensemble lacks discipline. But the liveliness of these young dancers and their interest in their work goes far to compensate a discipline-surfeited audience for an occasional straggle of lines and a topple of over-eager pirouettes.

The strength of the company lies in its artistic direction. And in the intelligence and personality of its leading dancer and choreographer, Roland Petit.

Boris Kochno, artistic assistant to Diaghilev, artistic adviser to Massine, artistic director to the company under comment, has a great understanding of the nature of International Ballet. He realises that to win the favour of the capitals of the world he must engage the best stage-designers that the world can offer—artists of wit and distinction—the arbiters of fashion. He must provide scores by distinguished composers. And he must find dancers of piquancy. Chic is the predominating ingredient of International Ballet, and honest academics find no place in Kochno's policy.

* * * *

The most exciting feature of the season has been the stage decorations, evocative and lightly achieved. The colour and economy and quality of the decorations and the cut and elegance of the costumes. The sheer tights and the real diamanté.

Bérard's colour and boldness and simplicity. Marie Laurencin's vernal glade. Beaurepaire's baroque lithography that so nearly redeemed the tedium of *Concert de Danses*. Clavé's homage to Goya—in crimson and purple and pale blue and black. The chic eroticism of Jean Hugo's costumes for *Les Amours de Jupiter*, and the amusing utility Gothic that changed an exterior to an interior by the single addition of a tulle-swathed chandelier in *La Fiancée du Diable*. Brassai's Rendezvous among the snapshots taken by giants, and Pierre Roy's Card-game.

The music was exciting too—amusing, effective and unprofound.

* * * *

The company came to us with eight full-scale one-act ballets and a few chips off the classical old block—chips that it would have been wiser to leave behind, for we present our classics more ceremoniously at the Wells.

These ballets have been elegant, eloquent and erotic. But they have shown a curiously detached attitude to life. They are in no way indicative of the mood of the world at this moment. No traces of the ravagement, the grief and the sudden ageing of war are to be found in the stories these young French choreographers animate. Their tragedies are personal tragedies, and might have been devised in 1938.

But the best of the ballets are very good indeed, and I, for one, watched them in a luxury of nostalgia.

The best ballet that the company presents, and indeed, one of the best ballets, within its own limitations, that any company presents, is *Les Forains*, the ballet about the travelling circus troupe with a simple, colourful, direct, and therefore effective setting by Christian Bérard, an evocative score by Sauguet, ranging from a quiet plaintiveness to a desperate gaiety, and with a realistic choreography by Roland Petit.

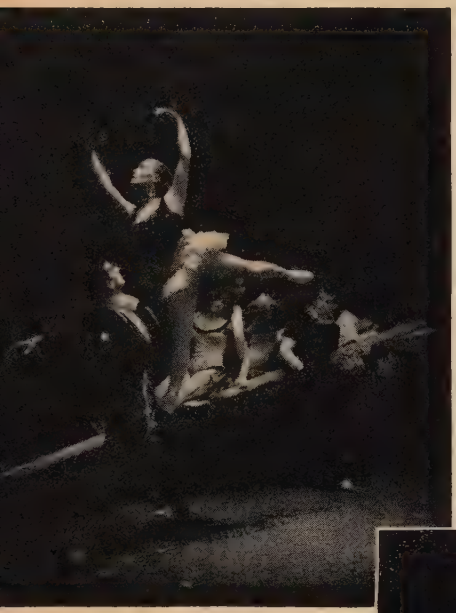
A troupe of circus performers trundles into a village, gives its show, and trundles off again. This is the whole frame and span of Roland Petit's magic. But the ballet is a masterpiece of mood with all the sudden gaiety and the nostalgia of an early Clair film, and the company performs it beautifully.

Second in my list of personal preferences is *Los Caprichos*, a ballet after Goya, to traditional Spanish music, with a charming décor by Clavé. Ana Nevada is the seventeen-year-old daughter of an Oran butcher. She is also a most intelligent young choreographer and a sensitive, musical, and accomplished Spanish dancer. Her ballet of the amours of a Goya Girl, with the toreador, the dwarf, and the cackling duenna threading their way through it, is a most mature and interesting example of a story told in the Spanish dance idiom.

Le Rendezvous is the story of a big city—a far more Latin Big City than that danced in by the Ballets Jooss. It has a *rideau* by Picasso and gigantic photographs take the place of painted back-cloths. In it Roland Petit, choreographer, and leading dancer, keeps a rendezvous

LES BALLETS DES

SPECIALLY PHOTOGRAPH

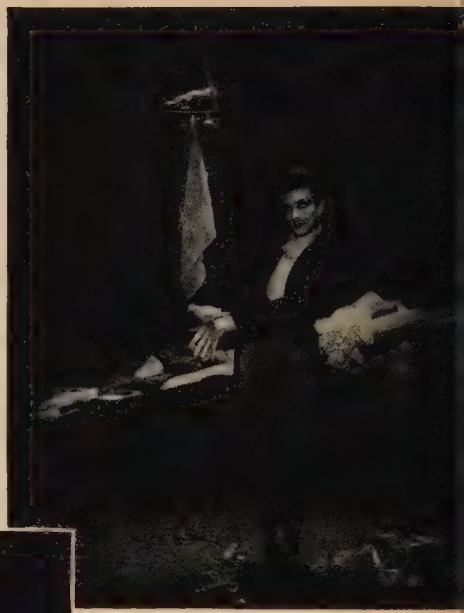


Solange Schwarz and Roland Petit

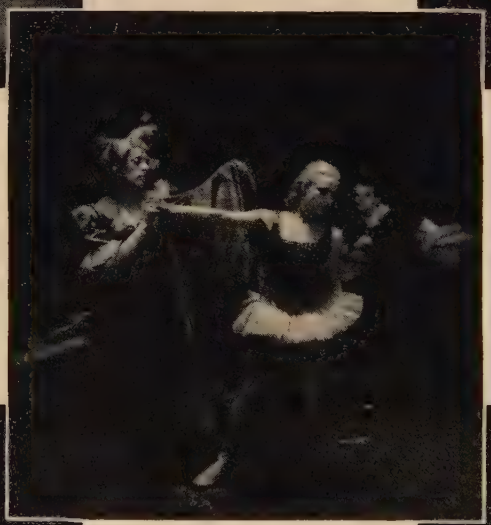
"LES FORAINS"

Ballet by Roland Petit, to music by Henri Sauguet, with décor by Christian Bérard

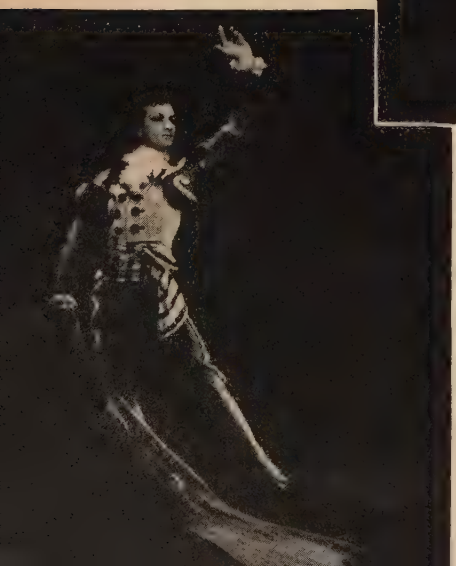
(*Below*) Solange Schwarz and Guy Lainé



Roland Petit



Roland Petit in *Los Caprichos*



Jean Babilée as The Blue Bird

SOUVENIR OF
ADELPHI THEATRE
SEASON—APRIL
9th to MAY 4th, 1946

CHAMPS ÉLYSÉES

BY EDWARD MANDINIAN

Irène Skorik as Leda with Roland Petit in *Les Amours de Jupiter*

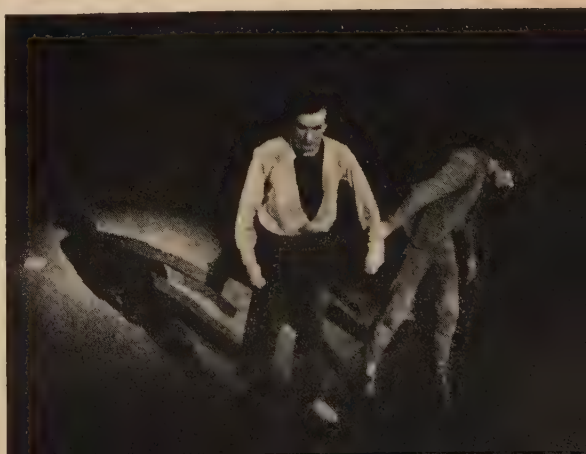
(*Right*) Ana Nevada as Juno, with Roland Petit in *Les Amours de Jupiter*

(*Right*) Solange Schwarz and Jean Babilée

TWO SCENES FROM "LE DÉJEUNER SUR L'HERBE"

(*Below*) Irène Skorik and Roland Petit

(*Right*) Roland Petit and Jean Babilée in *Le Rendezvous*



ROLAND PETIT BACK STAGE

with death. This ballet is memorable for its mood rather than for its movement, for the little street song sung without accompaniment by a *voyou* outside a bistro, and for the most erotic *pas de deux* that I have seen in Ballet Russe.

Déjeuner sur l'Herbe is notable for the soft greens of the Laurencin décors, the general feeling of the silliness and freshness of youth as the dancers "bur-r-rel" one another around (as we Scots put it) and pair off in a forest that is, to picnickers at least, forever enchanted.

Les Amours de Jupiter is a chic Parisian version of les amours de Jupiter. Choreographically the event is inclined to be static as well as ecstatic, but Petit has devised some interesting dance arrangements, and the dancers, dressed by Jean Hugo are ravishing, as well as ravished.

Jeu de Cartes, Janine Charrat's ballet to Stravinsky's amusing score, was given rather often. I feel dimly that S. J. Simon could write with more authority on this work than I.

But I liked the joker and thought Phillipart and Petit suitably dramatic and I enjoyed the music very much.

I found *Concert de Danses* too technical, too long, and too tedious. And *La Fiancée du Diable* which would offer such an opportunity to a Massine or a Balanchine, was too perfunctorily torn off by Petit. The ballet lacked choreographical invention.

* * * *

In Roland Petit and Jean Babilée, the company is to be congratulated on two male dancers of the first promise.

Petit has attack, precision and a magnetic stage presence. In any other company he would be a star. He is an excellent cavalier but is a little too heavy for the great classical variations.

Babilée combines precise and well-placed beats with a lovely fluid line. Here is a young dancer of little school but great promise, exciting to watch but hell to dance with. His Blue Bird is as soaring and effortless as his *Spectre de la Rose* (that hardy perennial that managements who fondly imagine they have discovered a new Nijinsky—and even some who know darn well they haven't—will keep watering) is arduous and earth bound, for all its springboard entrance and sickle-moon exit.

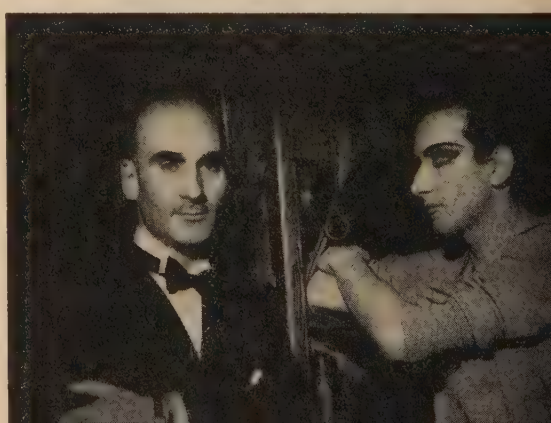
The company is less lucky in its ballerinas.

Solange Schwarz has an unrelenting technique and insufficient charm. Only in *Les Forains* did she seem to come to life and make some contribution to my pleasure. And Skorik has charm but no technique. Phillipart dances behind a frozen mask and chills while she enchants, though her maiden in *Spectre* comes nearer in feeling to the role than any I have seen.

What the company needs is a French Shearer, to grow with it and to queen over it, on equal terms with Roland Petit.

The Ballets des Champs Elysées were the first foreign company to dance for us since before the war. They have, for this reason, a special claim on our affection, our indulgence and our remembrance. And they have earned our admiration by reason of their elegance, their youthful friendliness and their most touching charm.

BORIS KOCHNO AND ROLAND PETIT



OPERA-BALLET AT SADLER'S WELLS

THE Sadler's Wells Opera-Ballet or junior company got off to a flying start on April 8th in very different circumstances from those attending the birth of the major company. The very name "Sadler's Wells" is now an infallible draw, and besides an audience the company had inherited a ready-made repertoire while the established school provided plenty of efficient young dancers. In such a situation it was imperative to produce some new ballets quickly to show the worth of the undertaking lest it should develop into a mere understudy of its elder.

Fortunately both Andrée Howard's *Assembly Ball* and Celia Franca's *Khadra* found exploitable qualities in the group of young dancers and were able to make some amends for the inexpert performances of *Promenade*, *Casse Noisette* and *Façade* and the murder of two Fokine ballets which proved to be quite beyond the company's prowess. Fokine ballets, particularly ballets requiring such quality of performance as *Les Sylphides* and *Le Spectre de la Rose*, should surely be saved as the prizes of a company's eventual maturity—not considered fair game for any youngsters who have mastered their comparatively simple technique.

Assembly Hall pointed the moral. Andrée Howard produced a lively little ballet, brimful of inventive dancing and containing touches of real magic in the slow movement, which was well within the capabilities of the company. June Brae's curiously languorous beauty and effortless charm were beautifully exploited and Leo Kersley's bounding high spirits and virility provided good contrast. Claude Newman also lent the strength of experience to his role of a slightly tiddly old gentleman and the corps de ballet were given full rein to indulge their enthusiasm. Slight overcrowding, particularly in the first movement, robbed the action of clarity, however, and stressed the fact that Bizet's power of invention was sustained somewhat better than the choreographer's. Miss Howard's costumes for the girls were well-designed and well made; but the boys' costumes and wigs were a dreadful warning of where *not* to economise in a ballet production.

Khadra, primarily, established Celia Franca as a choreographer to be reckoned with on a large scale as well as a small one and turned Honor Frost's decorative invention to the field where it may well lead her the farthest. *Khadra* is a blaze of colour and fantasy rather in the Gontcharova manner—although producing an effect not of Russia but, enchantingly, of the Persian miniatures which were the ballet's inspiration. The intricacy of design in both décor and costumes tends

(*Continued on page* 20)

LEO KERSLEY AND JUNE BRAE IN "ASSEMBLY BALL" *Photograph by Edward Mandinian*

THE SPRING SEASON IN NEW YORK

By MURRAY N. FRIEDMAN

AFTER a winter famine of ballet in New York, punctuated principally by the first appearance in four years of Carmelita Maracci and the two weeks season of Martha Graham's company, Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo returned for a six weeks engagement on February 17th. As usual, the City Center Theatre was packed to capacity, as all New York's dancers and balletomanes turned out for the occasion. The opening programme was chosen to represent Fokine with *Les Sylphides*, Balanchine with *Baiser de la Fée*, and Massine with *Gaité Parisienne*.

Les Sylphides was, as always, very well done, with Nathalie Krassovska and Leon Danielian especially notable. The beautiful Mlle. Krassovska, while not exciting in the popular sense, is a balletomane's joy to watch, and Danielian, with his excellent elevation and clean line is probably the best male lead *Les Sylphides* has to offer in America.

The big event of the evening was George Balanchine's revival of *Baiser de la Fée*, to music by Igor Stravinsky, who conducted this opening performance. The scenario is based on the well-known tale by Hans Christian Andersen. "A fairy imprints her magic kiss on a child at birth and parts it from its mother. Twenty years later, when the youth has attained the very zenith of his good fortune, on the day of his wedding, she repeats the fatal kiss and carries him off to live in supreme happiness with her ever afterward".

ALICIA MARKOVA AND ANTON DOLIN

Frederic Franklin as the bridegroom, and Alexandra Danilova as the bride, danced extremely well. Balanchine has provided them with several interesting pas de deux which show their artistry and teamwork to advantage. Maria Tallchief as the fairy, brought the house down with her sparkling technique. Marie-Jeanne, Ruthanna Boris, and Pauline Goddard danced the other principal roles.

On the debit side, the corps de ballet seemed inadequately rehearsed and their performance was ragged in spots. There was scarcely an opportunity to see how further performances would go. Frederic Franklin, overworked and suffering from backstrain, did not dance after the first week and the ballet was dropped from the repertoire until the final weeks, when Todd Bolender took over the role. The ballet will probably be revised, also, to take care of the long pause between the third tableau and the epilogue. The epilogue lasts only a couple of minutes, and the long wait while the scenery is being changed makes it seem anticlimactic.

The final ballet was *Gaité Parisienne*, which was absent from the repertoire last autumn. It was good to see it back. The gay music by Offenbach blends perfectly with Massine's mischievous choreography. Alexandra Danilova as the gloveseller, Frederic Franklin as the baron, Pauline Goddard as the flower girl, all danced with vivacity and humour. Massine's old part, the Peruvian, was taken by Leon Danielian. To his credit, he did not attempt to copy Massine, but interpreted the role in his own fashion, which was quite satisfactory. Maria Tallchief was the principal can-can dancer. All in all, a fitting close to a gala evening.

The next big event of the season was *Mozartiana*, with choreography by George Balanchine to music by Tchaikovsky. This ballet has no scenario, but is merely a set of contrapuntal dances in the form of a suite. This is among Balanchine's most satisfactory work and was seen in London in *Les Ballets* 1933. The gigue, executed by Stanley Zompakos, set the tone for the entire work. This was followed by a menuet, featuring Pauline Goddard and the corps de ballet, and a preghiera by Marie-Jeanne. That ballerina has never danced better than during the present season. Her technique is fabulous, her beats are sharp and fast and clear. The final movements were a theme and variations and a grand finale by the entire ensemble.

Frankie and Johnny, next to be revived, is a contribution by Ruth Page and Bentley Stone. It follows

the action of the old song. Frankie loves Johnny, who loves her too. After a tender love scene with Frankie, Johnny visits Nelly Bly and falls victim to her charms. Despite the efforts of her friends to keep the betrayal from her, Frankie discovers the infidelity and shoots him dead. Here is an authentic piece of Americana, portrayed with the aid of a chorus which intones the words of the dirge. Ruthanna Boris is superb as Frankie, and Frederic Franklin makes a very credible Johnny, while Nikita Talin, as the bartender, creates a minor masterpiece of make-believe. The seven divisions indicate the trend of the ballet: Sidewalk Stomp, Frankie and Johnny Blues, Beer Parlour Rag, Bartender's Rag, Frankie's Tune, Fox-Trot Murder, and Funeral Party One-Step.

Todd Bolender's *Comedia Balletica* was next in order. This is based on a choreographic interpretation of the game of musical chairs. Indeed, *Musical Chairs* was its original title. Bolender, himself, Leon Danielian, Marie-Jeanne, Ruthanna Boris and Beatrice Tompkins comprise the entire cast. Marie-Jeanne was especially good. It is no wonder that she is Balanchine's favourite young ballerina.

One must not leave the first part of the season without mentioning Mlle. Danilova's *Swan Lake*. No one really knows how old Danilova is and no one cares. She is the epitome of the *prima ballerina assoluta*. Every step, every gesture is done with authority and nobility. There is no finer Swan Queen now on the American ballet stage. She *is* the tragic queen from her very first entrance. It is to be hoped that English audiences will have another opportunity to see her before the years take too great a toll.

Her *Coppélia*, too, is a thing of beauty and charm, giving all the illusion of youth and all the know-how that only years of trouping can instil. Ballet Russe's *Coppélia*, a full three-act version, is slightly different from the presentation of the Sadler's Wells company.

The first really new attraction of the season was Balanchine's *Night Shadow*, a ballet in one act to the music of the modern Italian composer, Vittorio Rieti. The musical themes are taken from the works of Vincenzo Bellini and the wedding is not always satisfactory.

This is by no means the best of Balanchine, but it is, nevertheless, a very good piece of work. A poet and a coquette fall in love at a masked ball. When the coquette leaves, the poet sees a white apparition gliding toward him, walking in her sleep. He does not know, however, that she is the wife of his host, who keeps her locked away. He loses his heart to her and the coquette, who sees them together, tells the host. The latter stabs the poet. As the body is being carried out, the sleepwalker reappears and gently takes it away.

Alexandra Danilova excels herself as the sleepwalker, becoming a filmy, ethereal being and maintaining the illusion throughout the difficult things she is called on to do. Nicolas Magellanes is the poet. He is not a strong dancer, but has beautiful line and style. Maria Tallchief is both beautiful and menacing as the coquette.

Interpolated in the ballroom scene are several *divertissements*. Chief among these are a Blackamoor's Dance by Ruthanna Boris and Robert Lindgren, and a charming Harlequin Dance by Marie-Jeanne.

We shall leave some of the other features such as the *Nutcracker*, *Scheherazade*, *Beau Danube*, etc., and move on to the final novelty of the season, a three-act reinterpretation of the old favourite, *Raymonda*. Based on the classical ballet by Marius Petipa, this was re-created by Alexandra Danilova and George Balanchine. The lavish spectacle was, at least as far as I was concerned, a misadventure. It was dreary and over-long, relieved only occasionally by a brilliant pas de deux, an interesting ensemble or a clever *divertissement*. Only the last act was really alive, and perhaps the future will see just that part retained in the repertoire.

This final act consists of a number of interesting *divertissements*. I found the Czardas most satisfactory, but the Pas de Trois, the Pas Classique Hongrois, and the Variations are all imaginative and well-performed. Alexandra Danilova as Raymonda, Nicolas Magellanes as her fiancé, Jean de Brienne, and Nikita Talin as the villainous Saracen knight hold the principal roles. The last act, however, provides an opportunity for most of the company's stars, including Pauline Goddard, Stanley Zompakos, Marie-Jeanne, Yvonne Chouteau, Ruthanna Boris, Maria Tallchief and others.

BALLET THEATRE

The spring season of Ballet Theatre, at the Metropolitan Opera House, was notable as the last under the ægis of S. Hurok. Henceforth, Lucia Chase and Oliver Smith will direct the company independently. Their first plan is to bring it to Covent Garden early in July. Anton Dolin and Alicia Markova, however, are under personal contract to Mr. Hurok and will not make the trip. Instead, with their company augmented by such stars as George Skibine and Rosella Hightower, they will tour South America during the summer.

The opening night performance, on April 7th, Sunday, as usual, consisted of *Les Sylphides*, *On Stage*, the *Pas de Deux* from the *Nutcracker*, and *Bluebeard*. Miss Markova danced the Prelude in *Sylphides*, with André Eglevsky as the male lead. This is not Miss Markova's best role, but she danced with the lightness and individuality we have come to expect from her.

On Stage provides an interesting contrast. This modern ballet by Michael Kidd had its première last autumn. Despite the fact that it has been "ham and

eggs'' throughout the tour, being performed countless times, it retains its freshness and humour. The action takes place at a rehearsal of a new ballet backstage. Two young aspirants try out for the company. One is accepted; the other, danced by appealing Janet Reed, is nervous and is turned down. She sits and watches the rehearsal at which Nora Kaye and John Kriza play the leads. A Chaplinesque handyman, brilliantly portrayed by Michael Kidd, gives her courage when the company leaves the stage. She dances brilliantly, the handyman calls the ballet master to have another look, she is accepted, and all ends happily. The scene closes on the lonely handyman, who goes back to his sweeping.

Although this ballet has been criticised as being too theatrical, it has many beautiful, as well as comic moments. There is a scintillating pas de deux between Nora Kaye and John Kriza, and a fine character dance by Mr. Kidd. I think London audiences will like it.

Bluebeard finds Mr. Dolin at his comic zenith. Probably the last of Fokine's creations, it is a trifle long, but otherwise much fun. Lucia Chase is delightful as the philandering queen. Here, as in *Petrouchka*, *Judgment of Paris*, *Tally Ho*, and other ballets, she demonstrates her right to be called the leading feminine exponent of demi-caractère in America. Dolin makes a wonderful Baron Bluebeard, and Margaret Banks does a beautiful Sixth Wife, reminiscent of the lovely Irina Baronova.

No major new work was scheduled for this season, but Oboukhov created a pas de deux for Alicia Alonso and André Eglevsky to some music from *Le Pavillon d'Armide*. Miss Alonso has an excellent variation which she does in sparkling fashion, but apart from the fact that Mr. Eglevsky can't be bad in anything, the work as a whole is not inspiring.

Two highlights of the season were Markova's *Giselle* and Nora Kaye's *Pillar of Fire*. There is surely no Giselle outside of Russia, perhaps, to match Alicia Markova's. Her first act has improved considerably, and in the second act she is really incomparable. Her lightness is unbelievable. The audience cheered spontaneously throughout the performance and there were innumerable curtain calls when the ballet was over.

Pillar of Fire is probably Antony Tudor's most inspired piece of choreography. Hagar, fearful lest she remain a spinster like her older sister, and believing that her fiancé loves her younger sister, gives herself to a man she does not love. Ostracised by everyone, she finally discovers that her fiancé loves her and the ballet ends as they go off to start a new life together. The score, Schoenberg's *Verklaerte Nacht*, blends beautifully with the dance movements. Nora Kaye is absolutely superb as Hagar. Every gesture, every step is pregnant with meaning . . . with tragedy, frustration, and the other emotions called for. Withal, her performance is marked with masterly restraint. Covent Garden will acclaim her as the greatest modern dramatic ballerina when they see *Pillar of Fire*.

MARIE-JEANNE AND NICOLAS MAGALLANES IN "BALLET IMPERI

OPERA-BALLET AT SADLER'S WELLS

(*Continued from page* 17)

to be somewhat overwhelming but that may be because we have recently been so starved of decoration. Celia Franca's choreography is accomplished and in perfect sympathy with Sibelius's music; she handles her cast admirably and achieves nice contrast between quietude and fiery massed movement. She fails, however, in bringing to life the characters individually named in the programme; only Khadra, the lovers, and the old man are recognisable, and since the choreographer obviously is not interested in the others it would be better not to mislead the audience as to her intention. Also the movements for the dancers, although properly stylised, are based too much on the motif of the bent knee and become repetitive. But the *feeling* for ballet-making is manifestly there.

Summing up, the future strength of the Opera-Ballet looks like being as a testing ground for choreographers and also as a training field for dancers. It is not so much a question of giving the latter *confidence* (of which there seems to be almost a super-abundance) as of teaching them correct stage deportment and the simplicity of approach which will enable them to bridge the gap between classroom and stage.

MARY CLARKE.

Balletomane's Bookshelf

DIAGHILEV. By Serge Lifar. (Putnam, 35s. net.)

Some time ago, when needing the exact date of Diaghilev's death, I searched all likely volumes in my library in vain. When Lifar's compendious tome (in its 1945 edition) reached me, it proved, as expected, that the search was at an end. But this time I "won" much more than the precise details of day and hour. The chronicle of his last illness, and the hour-by-hour commentary on the approaching end recalled the bulletins which precede the passing of a monarch. There are other episodes referred to in this book which are worthy of a brief reference rather than a detailed and highly coloured description. Far too much has already been written about Nijinsky's mental collapse. Here, however, the story goes altogether beyond bounds, and its readers are regaled with minutiæ approaching the obscene. Those who remember him well will agree that he is in need of an appropriate epitaph. He was a man with a superlative physical aptitude for the dance, but whose musical and general artistic sense left, to put it mildly, much to be desired.

These superfluities are balanced by some interesting omissions. There are one or two high-lights on Diaghilev's character mention of which would have helped to illuminate it. The Paris encounter with the neglected and indignant Skryabin to whom, on an important occasion, the great man had omitted to send tickets, reveals both characters in the act of attaching more than the due importance to their personal contributions to the community's æsthetic enlightenment. And the story of Diaghilev's financial vicissitudes might also have been included, if only as an awful warning to the impresario who is in need of being cautioned against squandering money with one hand whilst in the other he extends an up-turned hat.

The book as a whole is a peculiar production. Some footnotes bear the initials of the author; others are the comment of an unnamed editor. The translation is anonymous. The English often soars into the stratosphere of "fine writing" occasionally punctuated by crashes into near-nonsense. The substitution of "vagrants" (when describing a once reputed band of artists) for the familiar "peripatetics" —as a translation of *peredvizhniki*—is rather like calling a well-groomed top-hat a shabby cap. One conspicuous feature of Mr. Lifar's volume appears to be common to all emanating from "star" members of the dancing confraternity. It contains little, if anything, approaching an expression of opinion about music. There is the usual emphasis on *fouettés*, *entrechats six*, *cabrioles*, *pliés* and the like, and the amazing facility with which certain performers executed these figures, which, in truth, have little significance for the genuine lover of the great art of Ballet. One does not con-

(*Continued on page 24*)

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SOVIET BALLET-A LETTER FROM MOSCOW

By ELENA ROSLAVLEVA

BALLET in modern Russia is a branch of the general development of art, and Russian art has definite goals set before it, goals which no creative effort could reach overnight but without which no art could remain progressive.

What is Ballet in Soviet Russia like? Against which known quantity should it be measured? We read frequently in books by British and other connoisseurs of the ballet that Russian ballet is supposed to be something like a flower pressed in a family album, just an old French court ballet, luckily preserved in Russia as a museum piece, reinforced by the Italian school carried on in St. Petersburg by French choreographers such as Didelot or Petipa.

In actual fact the Russian method is not a mechanical combination of French and Italian schools, not even a new interpretation of these methods with the help of the typical physical qualities of Russian ballerinas or the Russian temperament, but an entirely new embodiment producing an independent Russian classical school of ballet, an inspiration and ever-living charm which lie in the national spirit, in uninterrupted contact with it, and in what is so vaguely termed as "the Russian soul", which is, especially in art, a very definite thing.

One may say that beginning with the early 20th century there was a Russian school of classical dance based at first on individual interpretations by talented Russian ballerinas. Olga Preobrazhenskaya was one of the first to develop a new technique introducing something of her own. At about the same time Agrippina Vaganova started working on her own lines to produce by 1917 a classical technique which, being the result of many influences, does not copy anyone and does not imitate any school. Vaganova is now the only professor of ballet in Russia having the same privileges as a professor of any university. She was given every facility to develop her pedagogical talent and to teach on a large scale. This allowed her to create during the two decades before the last war a whole generation of ballerinas, among which shine such stars as Galina Ulanova, Marina Semyonova, Natalia Dudinskaya and many others.

Thus the ballet of present-day Russia is in every way a national Russian ballet because it never broke with its national traditions and with its great heritage. As a matter of fact it would be futile to isolate the study of Soviet ballet from the entire history of Russian ballet. Lev Ivanov's symphony dances in the swan scenes of *Lac des Cygnes* not only live on the Soviet stage in actual reproduction, but continue to serve as a source of inspiration and a goal to be reached in some new form by choreographers.

But besides preserving the best national ballet traditions Soviet ballet was also continuously enriching itself. The most important achievements lie in the field of technique and in the tendency to make a real choreographic performance out of ballet which for almost two centuries, with some few exceptions, was the excuse for a "divertissement" of dances.

At the same time Soviet ballet critics caution against the approach to ballet as a dramatic play without words. They say a ballet certainly should have a theme underlying it and a subject (one which can be interpreted with advantage only through the dance but which would not do on the dramatic stage). But because of the æsthetic laws to which the art of ballet is subordinate within the frame of the subject, the emotions are more important.

The aims of Soviet ballet are directed towards acting emotionally on an audience through the medium of dance. The mime is recognised only insofar as it keeps within the dance, but it will never form the body of ballet.

The æsthetic ideal are the so-called symphony dances—they act the same as symphony music—through creating emotions and are often called the vision of music.

Another ideal is the so-called Dance of Action dreamt of by the early choreographers beginning with Noverre. This ideal will probably also be reached when there will arise harmony of a book written especially for dance time, which cannot be developed with better advantage anywhere but in ballet, and music inspired by such a type of book.

Soviet ballet has already achieved first successes in this difficult task. Such are the third act of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* with Zasema's passionate dance of jealousy, which is dancing and not miming; and Ulanova's subtle and tragic dancing of the part of the Polish Princess trapped in the Khan's harem. The dance of despair in *Katerina* wherein the growing revolt of the serf peasants is shown through the traditional steps and hand movements of the folk dance; the third act of *The Flame of Paris*, where the entire mass of people on the stage dance as one to the tune of the *Ça Ira*: and one of the best creations of Soviet ballet—*The Nightingale*—a book by the leading Soviet ballet connoisseur Yuri Slonimsky, and the best male dancer, Alexei Yermolayev, who is also the choreographer of this ballet. *The Nightingale* was the first ballet which, still on an experimental but much larger scale and with much talent and imagination, used all the conventions of dance and not mime in order to rouse the emotions, which in their turn would create in the minds of the spectators big ideas underlying the book of this ballet.

Another feature of the new Soviet ballets is that they become multi-national. And this should not be understood narrowly; of course it is a very good thing that there are now Georgian ballets, Ukrainian ballets, Tajik and Uzbek ballets while the old ballet usually restricted its national dances to Russian, Spanish, Hungarian, Polish and other favourites. The importance of the new ballets using folk dances of other peoples is not the preservation of folk dances lest they disappear before we have recorded them but the expression of new emotions through the traditional steps. Such is the Khorumi Dance in *The Heart of the Hills*, excellently choreographed by another leading male dancer, Vakhtang Chabukiani. Into the ancient hunting dance Chabukiani introduced a new theme calling for battle. The dance acquired drama which it never before possessed; it was just a very rhythmical, strong, male dance. In the same way one saw in the subtle movements of the Georgian maidens, gliding *sur les pointes* with pitchers on their shoulders, how the traditional steps of the classical ballet started living a new life because they became enriched by national movements.

Here we come to the importance of the so-called character dancing in the classical ballet. In Soviet ballet it ceased being a *divertissement* of the endless Spanish and Polish dances and acquired its equal and just place alongside with classical ballet training.

(*Continued on next page*)

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(*Continued from page* 23)

As a result of all this the wall which separated in the ballet the purely classical dance from character dancing disappeared and several *pas* may be named which migrated from the classical dance into character dancing and back.

As a consequence of this progress within the classical school of ballet, Soviet dancers have access to a greater variety of parts almost in every genre.

The classical dance was and has remained in Soviet ballet the main instrument both for the choreographer and dancer. But though the classical system is as stable as a mathematical formula it would have become flat had it not acquired a new perfection within its rigid rules. Virtuosity of technique has become the possession not of two or three ballerinas but of the main body of the ballet.

Eight *tours* are no longer a wonder while in previous years ballerinas performed no more than two or three.

There was also a time when one circle around the stage (consisting of such *pas* as *chainés*, *jetés en tournant* and other *tours*) was considered the limit of what a ballerina could do. Now, not only Olga Lepeshinskaya, but many others can sweep the stage two or three times in a tempo usual for male dancers.

Natalia Dudinskaya performed a *double sauté de basque* —an achievement which was considered marvellous even for a male dancer.

One may also state with assurance that elements of acrobatics in a *pas de deux* when the ballerina is supported in the air by just the tip of her feet, or when she leaps from a distance into her partner's arms only to nest on his shoulder a second later— appeared in the Russian ballet only in Soviet times. All these innovations add to the vigour and tempo of the ballet dance and leave far behind the mere considerations of technique.

Soviet dancers owe this to many factors. First of all to the State which made art part of State interests. Secondly, to the vast audiences which come to the ballet—once the holy of holies of the enlightened dilletante, and the brilliant but empty crowd of the St. Petersburg Court. The ballet has become as much a possession of the people in Russia as any other art, though it has not lowered its standards in any way. Soviet dancers are grateful for their growth to such teachers as Vaganova, Ponomaryov, etc.

While the ghosts of Svetloff, Volkonsky and Andrei Levinson are still being called upon in foreign books on ballet we have such critics helping to build a new ballet as Yuri Slonimsky who in Soviet times (he is 43) became decidedly the most erudite living historian of ballet as a whole, and Vladimir Potapov (Golubov) who specialises on the problems of ballet æsthetics. There are other extremely erudite writers on ballet such as V. Volkov, M. Dolgopolov, V. Iving.

The war somewhat interrupted the progressive development of Soviet ballet. But this applies only to the smaller number of new Soviet ballets. As soon as the war was over we witnessed an unprecedented enlivening of all the Soviet stage and sure enough there were two new ballets, *Cinderella* and *Lady Rustic*.

The first ballet uses the Russian version of the favourite fairy tale, the second is after one of Pushkin's most charming works. But the time is very close when Soviet ballet will start experimenting on a large scale. It will derive its inspirations from the vital source of classical method which withstood the test of time and from the national spirit in a very broad sense of the word. And then the heroes of our days will appear in the ballet and new forms of dancing will be discovered bringing classical ballet on to new planes as inconceivable at present as the splitting of the atom before it was achieved.

(*Continued from page* 21)

gratulate an operatic composer on the brilliance of his arpeggios in the second act. Despite this tale of deficiencies the book is worthy of the attention of every balletomane; there are few pages which do not contain material of great interest, and the personal story of a very great man, told by one of his closest associates, does not fail to bring his astonishing personality into focus. M. MONTAGU-NATHAN.

THE SADLER'S WELLS BALLET. By Cyril W. Beaumont. (Beaumont, 21s.)

This is a companion volume to Mr. Beaumont's *Complete Book of Ballets* and his *Supplement to the Complete Book of Ballets*. It deals at length with the repertoire of the Sadler's Wells Ballet in the same manner as his other two books and is a mine of information, instruction and commonsense which will stand up to indefinite quarrying. Mr. Beaumont confines his remarks almost entirely to the repertoire, relating the stories or themes of each ballet in full and then offering some shrewd opinions on each. He is refreshingly unconcerned with personalities since his intention is to compile a standard work of reference, but where he finds cause to criticise the approach to a role he has invariably the best of reasons for his strictures, and his rare words of praise have more value to an artist than all the panegyrics under which ballet criticism is commonly smothered. Like all Mr. Beaumont's books this is beautifully produced, and its photographs have been most carefully chosen to illustrate the text. P.W.M.

THIS THING CALLED BALLET. By George Borodin. (Macdonald & Co., 15s.)

Whilst one would think twice before questioning any of Mr. Cyril W. Beaumont's pronouncements, and would then come to the conclusion that he was probably right, one would have no hesitation in challenging Mr. Borodin on a number of points if only on account of the various factual inaccuracies which

most of his readers will immediately spot. The publishers' "blurb" led one to hope that we were to have an entirely new viewpoint, but most of the ground he covers has already been thoroughly tilled. He does, indeed, trace the history of ballet back centuries before the usually accepted origins at the French Court of Louis XIV and states, truthfully enough, that the course of ballet has been from the people to the Court and back to the people. But he is sadly wide of the mark when he adds that "its strength rests on the people, and it is only when it becomes esoteric and the plaything of a wealthy few that it languishes and loses its virility", for ballet reached its highest point of perfection (not popularity) during the early Diaghilev years when the audience was almost entirely confined to the intelligentsia and society of the day. He draws an interesting analogy between ballet and the cinema, and I am at one with him in his plea for ballet to be itself and not an interpreter of something else. The photographs, many of which are shockingly bad in quality and chosen apparently haphazard and without reference to the context, are also incorrectly captioned in a number of instances. And everyone except presumably Mr. Borodin himself must stand agape at his representative choice of five dancers who have made names for themselves in English Ballet.

P.W.M.

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